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(TS//HCS//OC/NF) SUBJ: ATTEMPTS BY THE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION TO DISCREDIT NTV AND ORT

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(U) CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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(TS//HCS//OC/NF) 1. (b)(1)
THE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION (PA) WILL SOON ATTEMPT (b)(3)
TO DISCREDIT THE RIVAL INDEPENDENT TELEVISION NETWORK NTV AND MIGHT WITHDRAW ITS LICENSE AS EARLY AS MAY. CONSEQUENTLY, MANY NTV JOURNALISTS

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HAVE ALREADY QUIT THE NETWORK AND JOINED RIVAL TELEVISION OUTLETS ORT AND THE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED VGTRK. [redacted] COMMENT: THE PA REGARDS NTV AS AN ALIEN CHANNEL AND WILL AT LEAST TRY TO DISCREDIT IT. THE GOVERNMENT COULD REVOKE NTV'S LICENSE BECAUSE, OPERATING UNDER A PRESIDENTIAL DECREE USING THE FREQUENCIES OF A PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL CHANNEL, NTV FAILED TO PRODUCE A GOVERNMENT-MANDATED MAJOR EDUCATIONAL NETWORK ON THOSE FREQUENCIES. ALTERNATIVELY, THE PA COULD TRY TO HURT NTV FINANCIALLY BY RAISING THE COST OF ITS TV SIGNAL TRANSMITTER, WHICH FALLS UNDER VGTRK CONTROL. THE PA COULD FACILITATE NTV LOSING AN UPCOMING MAJOR FREQUENCY TENDER BY CHARGING AN EXORBITANT AMOUNT FOR IT. THE PA ALSO COULD DEMAND NTV SAVE ITSELF BY CUTTING A DEAL WITH THE KREMLIN, WHEREBY NTV WOULD AGREE TO FOLLOW GOVERNMENT DICTATES ON ITS PROGRAMMING.) [redacted] COMMENT: ACCORDING TO THE RUSSIAN MEDIA, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED A FEDERAL TENDER TO BE HELD ON 24 MAY 2000 FOR THE BROADCASTING LICENSES TO OPERATE ON CHANNEL ONE, CURRENTLY HELD BY ORT, AND ON CHANNEL THREE, NOW HELD BY MOSCOW MAYOR YURIY ((LUZHKOV))'S CENTER TV, AS WELL AS FOR A NUMBER OF REGIONAL RADIO AND TELEVISION CHANNELS. [redacted]

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(TS//HCS//OC/NF) 2. [redacted] MEDIA MINISTER MIKHAIL ((LESIN)) WANTS TO MANIPULATE OLIGARCH BORIS ((BEREZOVSKIY))'S ORT TELEVISION. [redacted] COMMENT: ORT, OR RUSSIAN PUBLIC TELEVISION, RUSSIA'S MOST FAR-REACHING NETWORK, IS MAJORITY STATE-OWNED BUT HAS BEEN FINANCED AND CONTROLLED LARGELY BY BEREZOVSKIY). LESIN IS HOPEFUL THAT HE CAN CONVINCE RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR ((PUTIN)) TO TRANSFER ORT FROM THE PREMIER CHANNEL ONE POSITION TO CHANNEL TWO TO REDUCE ORT'S AND BEREZOVSKIY'S INFLUENCE. [redacted] IF BEREZOVSKIY DOES NOT ENTHUSIASTICALLY SUPPORT THE NEW PA, [redacted] LESIN MIGHT PULL THE LICENSE FOR ORT ALTOGETHER. LESIN AND PUTIN ARE KEENLY AWARE THAT BEREZOVSKIY USED ORT TO UNDERMINE THE PAST GOVERNMENT, AND PROMINENT PA MEDIA OFFICIALS LIKE LESIN CONSIDER IT DANGEROUS TO ALLOW BEREZOVSKIY TO CONTINUE TO MANIPULATE THE PUBLIC VIA ORT. IN ADDITION, [redacted] PUTIN WOULD NOT WANT RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT MONEY FUNNELED TO ORT IF IT COULD BE USED AGAINST HIM. CONSEQUENTLY, [redacted] THE PA TO MOVE AGAINST ORT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

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(TS//HCS//OC/NF) 3. [redacted] COMMENT: LESIN COULD BE HINTING, HOWEVER, AT MOVING ORT TO CHANNEL TWO OR PULLING ITS LICENSE IN ORDER TO COERCE BEREZOVSKIY INTO BEING LOYAL TO PUTIN. IF LESIN DID PULL ORT'S LICENSE, HIS VIDEOINTERNATIONAL AD AGENCY WOULD LOSE THE FIVE-YEAR COMMERCIAL CONTRACT LESIN SIGNED WITH ORT. BUT WITH ORT IN VIRTUAL BANKRUPTCY, THE FIVE-YEAR CONTRACT MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH OF A FINANCIAL INCENTIVE FOR LESIN TO ALLOW ORT TO KEEP ITS LICENSE. THE BANKRUPTCY COULD ALSO BE USED AS AN EXCUSE TO REVOKE OR DECREASE BEREZOVSKIY'S LEADERSHIP OF ORT. WHETHER OR NOT ORT STAYS ON THE AIR, THE PA WILL LIKELY CONTINUE TO IMPLY THAT RIVAL PRESS OUTLETS WILL SUPPORT PUTIN OR FACE EXTINCTION. ORT, NTV, AND TV CENTER ALL FEEL THREATENED UNDER THE NEW REGIME.)

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